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SUBJECT: FONMIN MUASHER PUSHES GME, REGIONAL REFORM, AL SUMMIT INITIATIVE ON MEPP

Classified By: Amb. Edward W. Gnehm for reasons 1.5 (b) (d)

SUMMARY

1. (S) FonMin Muasher told the Ambassador February 18 that Jordan is suggesting that the Arab League endorse a set of reform principles that go along with the Greater Middle East initiative (GME). Muasher was supportive but expressed some concerns about the GME, hoping that it would not impose ideas from outside, try to avoid focusing on Islam as a problem (by including too many non-Arab Muslim countries), and include the President's vision of a two-state solution to give it greater regional credibility. He also said that Jordan has drafted a resolution for the upcoming Arab League (AL) summit to push the MEPP forward, and which also addresses many Israeli concerns. He claimed that he has found wide acceptance for the resolution among other Arab states. Muasher hopes to present the details of these ideas in Washington in mid-March before the AL Summit in Tunis at the end of that month. END SUMMARY.

THE GME AND ARAB REFORM PRINCIPLES

2. (S) Foreign Minister Marwan Muasher told the Ambassador and PolCouns February 18 that he had recently argued to Egyptian FonMin Ahmed Maher and Saudi FonMin Prince Saud al-Faisal that Arab states must take the GME seriously. He proposed that the Arab League endorse a set of reform principles -- including democracy, women's rights, education, and other key items -- that all Arab states would agree to adopt. Doing so would give the G-8 and other GME partners local momentum and initiatives to support. Jordan, he said, has no problem with reform -- in fact, it is leading reform efforts in the region. However, each country will reform at its own pace, and not all will make the swift progress Jordan has made. An AL-endorsed set of reform principles would fit with the goals of the GME, give GME ideas greater legitimacy in the region, and draw each country toward implementing a specific set of reforms, albeit at its own pace.

3. (S) Muasher outlined three Jordanian concerns regarding the GME. First, the GME must avoid being seen as imposed from outside, and therefore should be structured and publicized as a dialogue. The U.S. and its GME partners should work with indigenous reformers and ideas to the extent possible. Second, the GME should avoid steps that will make people in the region see it as an attack on Islam. While it makes some sense to include Turkey and Iran in the GME, he argued that the inclusion of Pakistan and Afghanistan introduces problems from outside the region and will leave the impression that GME is focused against Islam and Islamic societies. Third, the GME cannot ignore the Israeli-Palestinian conflict -- the single most important issue in the Middle East. Including as part of the GME the President's vision of a two state solution to the Arab-Israeli dispute would give it greater legitimacy in the region and encourage more countries to join and support the GME.

PUSHING A STRONGER AL SUMMIT RESOLUTION RE MEPP

4. (S) Muasher said that Jordan is developing a draft resolution for the Tunis AL Summit in March to reenergize the MEPP. The Jordanian draft, he said, contains four important elements to address U.S. and Israeli concerns: 1) a condemnation of "bombings" against civilians, 2) support for a comprehensive and permanent cease-fire including "all the needed security arrangements;" 3) a reiteration of the AL's Beirut Summit initiative that lays out in specific terms the benefits for Israel; and 4) a call for Israel to accept the roadmap without reservations. Muasher said he had consulted with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the Palestinians, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Amre Moussa, and described the general reactions as "surprisingly positive." Bahrain and Kuwait, he claimed, promised to push for GCC support for the same substance at the upcoming GCC summit. Muasher said he had not yet shared the draft with Syria so the Syrians would not get "a head start" in opposing it. He would let Prince Saud present the ideas to Syria.

MUASHER TO FOLLOW UP ALL OF THIS IN WASHINGTON

15. (S) Muasher said that he hoped to come to Washington March 10-12 -- after the GCC Summit and March 3-4 AL Foreign Minister's meeting, but before the March 29-30 AL Summit -- to present the set of reform principles he hopes the AL FonMins will adopt in Cairo. He also hopes to present a Jordanian reform plan including "specific programs and timelines" that Jordan will commit to implementing. He said the Jordanian cabinet should approve this plan in the near future. (Note: Subsequent to drafting this cable, we understand that the FonMin intends to arrive in Washington on March 8 and is available for meetings through Friday, March 12.)

COMMENT

16. (S) Muasher will argue to his Arab colleagues that the GME idea is gaining strength, and that Arabs should shape its content as much as possible by setting forth principles of reform themselves and focusing on indigenous reforms (such as Jordan's). By gaining endorsement of these ideas in the March AL Summit, he hopes G-8 leaders will endorse these regional initiatives rather than presenting ideas entirely from outside the region. Muasher, citing support from the King, is equally committed to an AL initiative to bolster the MEPP.

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